

Should Christians use the preferred pronouns of transgender individuals when referring to them?

[Transgenderism's](#) embrace by popular culture presents Christians with difficult choices. Among those is the issue of personal pronouns: words such as *he, him, his, or she, her, and hers*. In some situations, those who wish to identify as the opposite of their biological sex prefer to be spoken of using pronouns that correspond to their preference, not their biology. For example, a male who self-identifies as female might ask to be referred to as "she" or "her."

Beyond this, some persons claim to be completely different genders or combinations of genders. Such persons might ask to be referred to using pronouns such as *they* or *them*, or even "new" words like *xi, xim, or xer*.

So, does that mean a Christian can or should use "preferred pronouns," even just to be polite? Or should believers make a point of not using such terms at all, to avoid endorsing something untrue? As with many specific issues, the Bible does not give an explicit, word-for-word answer. There is no "thou shall" or "thou shalt not" for the use of modern preferred pronouns. What believers can do is look for guiding principles in order to make the best choice in a given situation.

In short, while Christians need to be careful and respectful, respect cannot extend to endorsing ideas that the Bible calls false. Whatever choice a Christian makes with respect to preferred pronouns, it's important that they not give the appearance of endorsing sin or self-deception. At the same time, believers ought to tread lightly on any issue that touches on sensitive emotions.

Some Christians may conclude that preferred pronouns are simply not an option. Embracing those terms rather than factually accurate pronouns is to speak or write in ways that agree with something false (**Isaiah 5:20** *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*). The person in question, in reality, is a member of a particular gender, not whatever gender he or she prefers or feels. As such, using pronouns that imply something else is at least inaccurate and might be construed as dishonest, hypocritical, or a rejection of biblical ideas.

Other Christians might conclude that refusing to use preferred pronouns would be the equivalent of constantly voicing disapproval, leading to added stress or conflict. From that standpoint, believers might decide that pronouns are not an issue about which they need to fall on their swords. Especially in cases of professional or personal relationships, believers may feel that it's best to "pick their battles" rather than take a rigid stance on such terms.

Of course, since this is not a black-and-white issue, Christians might find themselves varying between both of these options, depending on the circumstances. **Christians**

ought to consider at least three major themes when it comes to the issue of preferred pronouns: **respect for all persons, personal relationships, and speaking truth.**

Beyond these themes, it's useful to understand the difference between personal pronouns and personal names, secular concerns with this issue, and the use of gendered pronouns with respect to God.

Respect for All Persons

Even when disagreeing about an important issue, believers must act in gentleness and with respect (1 Peter 3:15). Rebuke and condemnation have their place (Proverbs 27:5; Titus 1:9), but when a person is sincere and seeking, "mercy" is supposed to be the guiding principle (Jude 1:22). No matter how a Christian chooses to handle the issue of preferred pronouns, it's imperative to do so in as gentle and peaceable a way as possible (Romans 12:18). All people are broken without Christ (Romans 3:10).

Acting in gentleness does not require believers to lie, betray their conscience, or give a false sense of support (Romans 16:18; Acts 5:29). It does, however, mean that Christians cannot justify approaching the subject in a careless or callous way.

Personal Relationships

As with many issues, one's approach to transgender issues is affected by context and audience. Referring to a third person, such as a celebrity who is not present, is markedly different from having a face-to-face conversation with a coworker or family member. Interacting with a friend is different from discussing the issue in some public way with a complete stranger. Varying circumstances don't alter what's right or wrong, but they do influence how or when a believer engages.

This is part of being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16): being careful and sensitive to those who are hearing or reading one's words.

Speaking Truth

The reason preferred pronouns present a dilemma for Christians is that they imply something the Bible indicates is false: that a person can change genders or be born into the wrong biological sex. Referring to a person who is biologically male as "she" or "her" is, in literal terms, to say something untrue. Worse, when it comes to an issue such as transgenderism, using preferred pronouns can be construed as enabling or endorsing a harmful, unbiblical situation.

From a spiritual and scriptural standpoint, then, the literal intent behind preferred pronouns is unbiblical. Men are not women, and vice versa. Other than a tiny percentage of persons who are biologically intersexed and deserving of special consideration, there are no third, fourth, fifth, etc., genders, nor any basis for a person to

“choose” such a thing. For the same reason that believers ought not pretend that other faiths offer salvation ([John 14:6](#)) or that other gods are real ([1 John 4:1](#)) or that something sinful is morally right ([Isaiah 5:20](#)), many believers conclude that it’s immoral to enable the basic premise behind the use of preferred pronouns.

This is why, at the very least, all believers, in all circumstances, need to be careful not to give the impression of accepting the assumption behind preferred pronouns. While Christ was merciful and loving to both the adulterous woman ([John 8:10](#)) and the woman at the well ([John 4:23–24](#)), He gave no mixed signals about their sin ([John 4:17–18](#); [8:11](#)).

Equally important to consider is the believer’s primary mission to reach lost people for the sake of Christ ([1 Corinthians 1:17](#); [2 Corinthians 4:3](#)). Part of reaching them is sharing the love of Christ ([Mark 12:30–31](#); [Romans 1:14–16](#); [1 Peter 4:8](#)). As unfair and inappropriate as it might be for someone to “demand” other people use words they prefer, unbelievers cannot be expected to think and feel like believers ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)). Conceding the use of preferred pronouns, some Christians would argue, is a form of “going the extra mile” ([Matthew 5:39–42](#)), so long as it’s clear we’re using such words as a gesture of respect, not in agreement.

Each Christian needs to weigh these concerns when deciding how, or if, to discuss the issue of preferred pronouns. Truth is important, but that does not mean the choice not to use preferred pronouns has to be handled rudely or cruelly.

Pronouns Versus Names

Personal names are different from personal pronouns. Names are an indication of which particular person, place, or thing is being discussed. Pronouns, on the other hand, imply what that person, place, or thing is. Certain names might be culturally unusual, but using the name a person prefers is not in the same category as using the pronoun a person prefers.

For example, if a person’s name is Charles, he might prefer to be called “Chuck” or a nickname such as “Ace” or “Slim.” Actors and entertainers often use a “stage name” professionally. In this way, it’s arguable that the use of names in modern culture is merely to identify the particular person, not to define them. So, if Chuck wants to be called “Betty,” that might be odd, but it’s not the same as actually saying, “Chuck is female.” Then again, one could argue that using a preferred name, chosen because it corresponds to a preferred gender, is also a form of enablement.

Secular Concerns

Preferred pronouns also create issues from a secular standpoint, without taking religious values into account. As stated above, using words like *he* or *she* implies something about the biology of the subject. Forcing people to use preferred pronouns, then, would

literally be a coercion of speech. Demanding that others use such terms implies that you have a right for other people to speak or write in ways that agree with you. At least in legal terms, it's hard to imagine society could forcibly require the use of language that overtly contradicts certain opinions or ideas.

As a parallel, demanding use of preferred pronouns would be like insisting that others refer to us as "your majesty," with a bow or curtsy, because we feel we are royal-blooded, even though they don't believe we are.

Again, Christians should weigh a reasonable need to contend for truth (*Jude 1:3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*) with a command to be accommodating to others when appropriate (*Matthew 5:41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*).

Gendered Pronouns and God

In a shallow sense, the Bible does present an instance of preferred pronouns when it comes to God. The Bible overwhelmingly uses [masculine terminology for God](#), including frequent allusions to Him as "Father." This is despite the fact that God is not literally male or female.

However, God's preference for *He* and *Him* is not a reasonable parallel to the use of preferred pronouns as related to transgenderism. First and foremost, God does not claim to actually be a literal male or that using such pronouns implies that He is actually a literal male. Preferred pronouns, as applied to human beings, can suggest a gender different from what's biologically or psychologically true. With God, this is not the case.

In contrast, those who dogmatically call God "her" or "she" are really referring to a different deity. In the same sense that a Muslim might use words like *God* or *Allah* but mean a being with a totally different nature, those who insist on using gender-neutral or female terms for God are effectively speaking of a completely different being from the biblical God.

Complications of the Fall

Human sin has resulted in a fallen world ([Romans 5:12](#)). That sin, by its nature, confuses and complicates issues that God has otherwise made clear ([Romans 1:21–22](#)).

Unfortunately, issues such as preferred pronouns create difficult choices for Christians. While followers of Christ want to be loving, caring, and peaceable ([1 Corinthians 13](#)), it is also important to obey God rather than men ([Acts 5:29](#)), and that includes speaking truth in love ([Ephesians 4:15](#)) rather than shrinking from controversy for the sake of social comfort ([Hebrews 10:23](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:21](#)).

Where the balance of those concerns falls, in any given moment, is something for each believer to prayerfully, carefully consider.